

Prayer Meeting

Week Beginning February 21.

TOPIC: THE POWER OF FAITH.

Matt. 8:5-13.

A centurion was the commander of a hundred men in the Roman legions. The average Roman soldiery consisted of men of repute and the rank of centurion was correspondingly high. This officer, who came to Jesus as he entered into Capernaum, was probably of good family, education and fortune. Being a Roman, he was of heathen religion in his training and had cordially hated the religion of the Jews. But his vocation having brought him into contact with Jewish teachings and worship, he became acquainted with the Scriptures, and had evidently developed respect for and confidence in the once despised faith; and had overcome Jewish prejudice against himself as we learn from Luke 7:1-10. It appears from Luke's account that he first sent elders of the Jews to implore our Lord's blessing upon his sick servant and in making their plea they said, "He loveth our nation and hath built us a synagogue." It is not improbable that this officer had embraced the Jewish faith as is indicated by his building a synagogue and further by his compassionate regard for his servant. He seems to have had a regard more tender than merely that of an austere officer for a dependent subordinate (God's compassion toward us makes us compassionate toward others). His having sent the elders to Jesus, then a company of his friends, and probably having come to Jesus in person, would indicate his extraordinary solicitude.

The humility of this man, who by his training might be expected to exhibit a haughty spirit, is noteworthy. "I am not worthy that thou shouldst come under my roof; but speak the word only and my servant shall be healed." Here is strikingly presented another characteristic of Christian faith. The one to whom he made his appeal was a poor Jew and himself belonged to the proud, powerful nation that held the Jews in subjection, yet he sincerely felt that he was not worthy to receive Jesus into his home. This is the spirit of true discipleship. "Though the Lord be high, yet hath he respect unto the lowly, but the proud he knoweth afar off."

The centurion's faith was remarkable, for he not only thought Jesus could heal his servant, but that there was no need of methods or even of personal contact. The Master's command was sufficient. The divine volition would impart healing power. He believed that the authority of Jesus was supreme and that his will could not be thwarted by conditions even so desperate.

This suppliant's intelligence is admirable. He showed that he had a proper apprehension of Christ's relation to humanity. He illustrated this by his own position as a "man under authority." He knew what it was to command and to have his commands obeyed, and he accorded to Jesus the authority he had claimed and had exercised. Intelligence of revealed truth is in order to genuine faith.

That which our Lord commended, in the entire bearing of this man, was his faith. Jesus "marveled and said, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel." Not even among his disciples had he seen such an instance of faith. He then announces the solemn fact that Gentiles shall come from distant parts and shall be heirs with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, to the riches of the kingdom, while "children of the kingdom," who fancied that they were entitled to its exclusive blessings, would be cast out.

Our Lord wants a faith in us that will appropriate his own infinite resources in supplying our needs and blessing our lives to the glory of his name.

Young People's Society

PRESENT DAY PIONEERS.

Topic for Sunday, February 28: "Home Missions; Present Day Pioneers"—Ecclesiastes 11:14.

DAILY READINGS.

Monday: The sower of the seed. Matthew 13:3-9.

Tuesday: A missionary call. Jeremiah 1:4-10.

Wednesday: A missionary message. Isaiah 40:1-11.

Thursday: The Missionary hardships. II Timothy 2:17.

Friday: Achieving impossibilities. Ezekiel 37.

Saturday: Missionary hardships. II Timothy 2:1-7.

The church puts a halo around the head of its missionary to the foreign field. It owes one just as well to the man who works in its home mission field.

To give the one is right; to deny the other is wrong. Not one whit less interest should be taken in the foreign worker; not one whit less should be given to the mission worker at home.

A man is as much a pioneer of the church who penetrates an unoccupied field in our own country as the one who goes to a foreign land. The distinction between home and foreign missions is not justified by the Bible.

That home missionary is a special hero who goes to the weak and struggling churches. There is almost obloquy in the act, rather than glamour. He takes his reputation in his hand when he goes to such a field. It ought not so to be.

But just such heroes are needed, men who will for their Lord's sake go anywhere rather than for their own glory remain in more ambitious places. Such men are of the stuff of which true greatness is made. One day they will be properly appraised and appreciated.

The call for zealous and steadfast home workers is very great just now. Every Synod in the church could use many men, and in the newer Synods great areas of territory lie fallow and untouched where dozens of men of the right kind could be placed if they could be found. It is not so much the means as it is the men that is the present problem.

What splendid results come to the church from her investment in this department of activity! Texas is a fine example. That powerful Synod was twenty or thirty years ago our great home mission field. It was cultivated, not as fully perhaps as might have been, and today is rich towards other sections in manifold forms of beneficence, has her own great institutions, and is sending the gospel to other parts of the world.

Louisiana today calls for more men and more care perhaps than any other section of our church. Only forty-seven ministers work in her great territory. Parish after parish has in it not a single Protestant church. Thousand of foreign-speaking people are pouring into her borders every year. There are three hundred thousand French-speaking people who never hear the gospel in its purity.

To be the pioneers of a great work, what a glory it will be! How illustrious is the name of Whitman, who opened Oregon, and of Jackson, who opened Alaska! Wilson and Byers in Texas, Welch in Arkansas, are names that will live forever. The journeys of Gideon Blackburn into Tennessee are treasured memories yet in the homes of the older people of the Volunteer State. Arnold Miller's summer tours through Western North Carolina almost marked an epoch to those people.

"Sow beside all waters" is the great command. The promise of a harvest is assured. "Regard not the signs" is another command. One should not take counsel of his fears or yield to the inauspiciousness of the surroundings. God will take care of the results. Good seed and good soil and heaven to help both always produce a harvest.